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# ETUCE

## European Trade Union Committee for Education EI European Region

### ETUCE's views on the public consultation on the implementation of the European disability strategy 2010-2020

#### EUROPEAN REGION- ETUCE

##### President

Christine BLOWER

##### Vice-Presidents

Odile CORDELIER  
Andreas KELLER  
Trudy KERPERIEN  
Dorte LANGE  
Galina MERKULOVA  
Branimir STRUKELJ

*(adopted by the ETUCE Bureau on 17 October 2019)*

The European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 is the EU's main policy document in the field of disability and it sets out objectives and actions for implementing disability policy at EU level. The European Commission has launched a [public consultation](#) to assess how the Strategy was implemented during the period 2010-2020. The information collected through this consultation is to be used for helping the Commission to draw lessons on how to re-shape disability policy in the future, making it more effective and focused.



5, Bd du Roi Albert II, 9th  
1210 Brussels, Belgium  
Tel +32 2 224 06 91/92  
Fax +32 2 224 06 94  
[secretariat@csee-etuice.org](mailto:secretariat@csee-etuice.org)  
<http://www.csee-etuice.org>

##### European Director

Susan FLOCKEN

##### Treasurer

Mike JENNINGS

ETUCE<sup>1</sup> welcomes the public consultation on the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 and wishes to contribute the point of view of education trade unions as social partners in the education sector. ETUCE emphasises the importance of an inclusive education for young people and children with disabilities, as stipulated in the [UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (CRPD). Despite the importance the European Disability Strategy gives to education and training as one of the eight main areas of action, the reality remains different. The inclusion of children with special needs into local schools continues to be a challenge for, amongst other reasons, cuts in public funding in the education sector and growing privatisation trends in education. According to the [Fundamental Rights Report 2019 of the Fundamental Rights Agency](#), discrimination against children with disabilities is more prominent at private schools: Danish Institute for Human Rights found that children with disabilities were 31% more likely to move to a public school from a private school due to the lack of necessary accommodations and in some cases, even exclusion of a child by the school. Furthermore, even though, teachers and trainers play a key role in helping children with disabilities to access high quality and inclusive education, in many European countries, learning groups comprise of too many children and teachers are often left alone in classes, without additional support personnel and without adequate training.

The following statement provides ETUCE's views on the implementation of the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020, as well as proposals for priorities and measures to introduce into and/or strengthen in the Disability Strategy post-2020.

1. In order to not remain a mere declaration of rights, the European Disability Strategy must contain **a clear commitment of the European Commission to closely monitor its implementation**, including gathering all kind of data on the state of art in each country and fostering the **upward conversion** of the existing national legislation. Furthermore, it is crucial that the Disability Strategy specifies **a consistent funding**

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<sup>1</sup> The European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) represents 132 education trade unions and 11 million teachers in 51 country of Europe. ETUCE is a Social Partner in education at the EU level and a European Trade Union Federation within the European Trade Union Confederation. ETUCE is the European Region of Education International, the global federation of education trade unions.

**allocated for the implementation of each point** of the Strategy, as well as indicates the funding sources in the structure of the European (e.g. European Structural Funds, Erasmus+ programmes, etc.) and national funding.

2. The current Strategy focuses exclusively on the integration of disabled adults into the labour market, considering only young people aged 16-19 in the education and training action area. ETUCE highlights that even though some legal and organisational barriers to general education and lifelong learning systems were removed for people with disabilities, none of the EU countries has a fully inclusive system where 100% of learners attend mainstream schools and are educated with their peers for 100% of the time<sup>2</sup>. ETUCE calls on the European Commission and the Member States to **remove legal, physical and organisational barriers, as well as to provide adequate accommodation of the school infrastructure, curricula and teaching methods**, for all persons with disabilities in order to guarantee inclusive education and lifelong learning systems. The European Disability Strategy post-2020 has to include the need of granting children and students with special needs the right to attend ordinary schools, to have access to specialised teachers and other education personnel, as well as to ad-hoc tools and programmes.
3. Education is a fundamental human right as stipulated in the [Sustainable Development Goal 4](#), [Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), and [Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights](#) and should be accessible to everyone regardless of their abilities and educational needs. ETUCE underlines the importance of the holistic approach to education which considers not only the integration of disabled adults into society, but focuses also on the specific learning needs of children and young people with disabilities. Such approach requires teachers, trainers, and other education personnel who are trained and supported in responding to specific needs of students with disabilities and supporting their learning with adequate methods and programmes. Therefore, the European Disability Strategy post-2020 needs to highlight the **importance of initial and continuous professional development of education personnel to work with persons with special needs, as well as the crucial need of specialised assistants in the classrooms and smaller class sizes**. The education sector plays an important role in enhancing an inclusive society; therefore the member states should feel responsible to support schools and other educational institutions financially and through guidelines in reaching this goal.
4. In Special Needs Education, **ICT can be a great tool in providing additional support and access to learning** as well as, offering ICT equipment can enhance the learning of students with disabilities and to provide teachers with the material needed to better support these students. However, ETUCE warns that without proper social inclusion of students with special needs in the classroom, the use of ICT for their learning might lead to their isolation. Furthermore, digital business and economic

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<sup>2</sup> European Parliament, [Inclusive Education for Learners with Disabilities](#), 2017.

technological approaches are extremely harmful regarding ICT for inclusive education, contributing to privatisation and commercialisation of education deepening inequalities and exclusion, especially in regards to students with special needs. As highlighted in the [ETUCE Statement on Digitalisation, employability and inclusiveness](#), in addition to **up-to-date and sustainable ICT initial and continuous teacher training, teachers, academics and other education personnel need to be better equipped to use specific ICTs** (e.g. adaptive or assistive devices) so that they can be effectively supported in their use of ICT as a tool for personalised learning in inclusive settings at all levels of education.

5. As already pointed out in the [Statement on the mid-term review of European Disability Strategy 2010-2020](#), ETUCE is concerned about the lack of reference in the Strategy to the **need to help the families of disabled students and to the important role that parents and families of disabled students and young people have in taking care of their education**. It is crucial to develop and outline in the Strategy adequate measures in favour of the families who take care of disabled persons.
6. Finally, ETUCE suggests that the European Commission and Member States promote **effective social dialogue on how to integrate children and students with special needs in education and how to build inclusive education systems**, not only with the European Disability Movement, but also with education trade unions.

It is crucial that all European Member States improve their legal frameworks on the inclusion of people with disabilities into the education system and labour market, as well as that educational institutions receive more support to help increase the educational opportunities for teachers and students with special needs to create a more inclusive education. In order to make the European Disability Strategy work, **it has to be linked to the review and revision of policies, programmes and funding instruments, as well as to a clear implementation timeframe, budget and specific benchmarks and indicators**.